

8. Archeologists and Interpreters Working Together

Sharing Our Archeological Heritage with the Public

Archeologists and interpreters can work together to provide effective and accurate interpretation of archeological information and resources to the public. Together they enrich visitor experience. They can create opportunities for audiences to learn about archeological interpretations and how they are made, and to ascribe their own meanings to archeological resources. This helps increase public understanding and concern for the preservation and protection of archeological resources.

To do this, archeologists and interpreters should develop and maintain a dialogue so that archeologists help interpreters gain knowledge of activities that involve archeological resources. Archeologists and interpreters should together analyze the potential impacts of interpretive programs on the resources being interpreted, balancing on-site visitor experience with the cumulative and potentially damaging impacts of visitation.

Archeologists and interpreters should ensure that the archeological heritage in national park units is accessible and available to all people. A wide variety of interpretive tools and techniques exist to educate the public about park archeological resources. Tours, exhibits, excavations, publications, web sites, and lectures are some of the most frequent types of educational programs used in parks. These programs create opportunities for audiences to ascribe meanings to archeological resources, leading to concern for protection of the resources.

Archeologists and interpreters encounter visitors with different levels of archeological knowledge. Some visitors have worked on an archeological site while others know little about archeologists and archeological resources. Successful interpretive programs will stimulate each visitor regardless of the level of his or her archeological knowledge. Archeologists and interpreters who can quickly assess visitors' archeological experience and knowledge can provide experiences that strengthen visitors' recognition, understanding, enjoyment, and preservation of the nation's archeological resources.

Teamwork

The objectives of teamwork between archeologists and interpreters:

- Create well-balanced, holistic interpretive plans that accurately reflect management concerns, attention to all resources, and address major park themes
- Integrate current archeological information into interpretive services
- Work toward mutual understanding of interpretive themes, techniques, and opportunities
- Actively contribute or solicit input from other experts to produce or present well balanced interpretations
- Frequently interact and discuss the status of archeological projects, programs, actions, and how they might be relevant to interpretive programs
- Create training opportunities (formal or informal) for park interpreters, keeping them apprised of current research, new theories, and possible conflicting explanations about the park's archeological record

Case Study

Public Archeology Program at Petersburg National Battlefield

This web site illustrates the interpretive elements created to interpret the Federal picket line excavation at Petersburg National Battlefield.

Partnerships with non-NPS Entities

Archeologists and interpreters may create opportunities to work with non-NPS entities to enhance public understanding and stewardship of archeological resources. Effective partnerships often deliver better products and services than each partner could independently. Each partner can better achieve their individual visions in keeping with their missions. Partnerships enable each participant to contribute in an area of their strength and receive in an area of deficit. Each partner can contribute new perspectives that result in enhanced interpretation programs and services. Usually partnerships are born out of the inability of either entity to fully carry out a mission; sometimes they arise from the realization that a vision could be more closely approached through combining forces. Sometimes they are required, such as in a concession contract. It is essential to be able to analyze unit needs to determine when or if partnerships are warranted (NPS Interpretive Training Module 320).

National Park Service units maintain a vast range of partnerships with non-NPS entities. Partnerships exist between parks and educational institutions and organizations, Native American groups, federal, state and local governmental agencies, private-sector businesses, and non-profit organizations, to name a few.

Try it Yourself

Module 320: Partners in Interpretation

This NPS training module enables NPS units to establish successful partnerships in interpretation with non-NPS entities that produce or enhance interpretive products or services that help each partner achieve their vision consistent with their mission.

Case Study

From Philadelphia: Archeology for Parks and Partners

This web site describes the Stewardship and Partnerships Team in the Philadelphia Support Office, which provides archeological assistance to a wide variety of agencies and organizations throughout the Northeast Region of the National Park Service.

Partnerships

This web site lists and lists the many federal, state, and local organizations collaborating with the National Park Service to develop and accomplish the goals of the Mississippi Delta Outreach programs and the Lower Mississippi Delta Region Initiative.

A Final Thought for Archeologists and Interpreters

An archeologist's knowledge of techniques for interpreting archeological resources is one of the most important elements in helping visitors understand their value and fragility. The archeologist must care about both the archeological resource and facilitating interpretive opportunities and outcomes if he or she wishes to inspire caring in others.

Archeologists who have little interpretive experience or few opportunities to interact directly with visitors may benefit from applying the Interpretive Equation to programs they present-alone or in concert with park interpretive staff-to a variety of park visitors. Learning to apply appropriate interpretive tools allows the archeologist to effectively engage interpreters and visitors and promote interest, participation, and stewardship.

Case Study

Interpretation and Education in the Northeast Region

This web site presents the NPS Northeast region's goals, strategies and resources for interpretation and education.

Use What You Know: *Assess Your Knowledge* (#10 of 10)

- How has your understanding of interpretation changed as a result of this training guide?
- What ways to you plan to apply your new knowledge, skills, and abilities?



References

Portions of this chapter were adapted from:

NPS Training Manager for Interpretation, Education, and Cooperating Associations (editor)
2000 NPS Training Module 320: Partnerships in Interpretation. National Park Service.